



The Press Complaints Commission is the independent self-regulatory body for the UK newspaper and magazine industry. It administers a 16-Clause Code of Practice, dealing with issues of accuracy and privacy in reporting and how journalists should behave in gathering the news. The Code – which also covers newspaper and magazine websites, including editorial audio-visual material – can be found at www.pcc.org.uk. Clause 8 (Hospitals) deals specifically with the issue of newspapers’ conduct towards those in hospital. This leaflet sets out in more detail how the PCC can help in such cases.

Journalists at hospitals

Unless there is a public interest reason for doing otherwise, journalists must identify themselves to a ‘responsible executive’ and obtain permission before entering a non-public area of a hospital, which includes wards and treatment areas. Clause 8 of the Code also covers ‘similar institutions’ to hospitals which also offer medical facilities, and – for example – the PCC has upheld a complaint about a journalist entering a nursing home without the consent of an executive.

Privacy for those in hospital

The Code makes clear that the restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions. Clause 3 (Privacy) states that newspapers must show respect for a person’s private life, which specifically includes their health. The PCC has made clear that a person’s medical details – which could, for example, include specific information about illness or treatment, or the fact of pregnancy before the twelve-week scan – should be considered private unless there are good public interest reasons to suggest otherwise.

Harassment help

The PCC can also help deal with physical harassment by journalists, especially towards those in hospital or their families at home. When there is no public interest for doing so, journalists should not follow or persistently question people once they have been asked to desist. The PCC can help with unwanted approaches by journalists by passing desist messages to relevant editors and broadcasters.

This service can be accessed by calling 07659 152656 any time of the day or night, 7 days a week.

Other PCC services

If a complaint is made, the PCC offers quick and hassle-free redress for the complainant. Named case officers will seek to mediate between the complainant and the editor in order to obtain an appropriate settlement. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, including: the publication of an apology, correction, letter or follow-up article; a private letter of apology from the editor; and the removal of inaccurate or intrusive material from a website. Further examples of successful mediation can be seen at www.pcc.org.uk/cases.

In some cases – usually when mediation has failed – the PCC can also issue formal rebukes which must be published in full and prominently by newspapers and magazines. This acts as a powerful ‘name and shame’ sanction against publications.

Before any story is published, the PCC can help reassure individuals that their position has been taken into account at the publication concerned. The PCC can either advise individuals on how to deal with the newspaper or magazine or, in rarer cases, pass on specific concerns to publications. There is no need to make a formal complaint to use this service.

www.pcc.org.uk

The PCC’s website is updated on a daily basis and includes details of every resolved and adjudicated complaint, along with news items about the PCC.

Contact details

Press Complaints Commission
 Halton House, 20/23 Holborn, London EC1N 2JD
 Switchboard: 020 7831 0022
 Facsimile: 020 7831 0025
 Email: complaints@pcc.org.uk
 24 hour Advice line: 07659 152656

Or email the PCC’s Head of Complaints directly
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www.pcc.org.uk